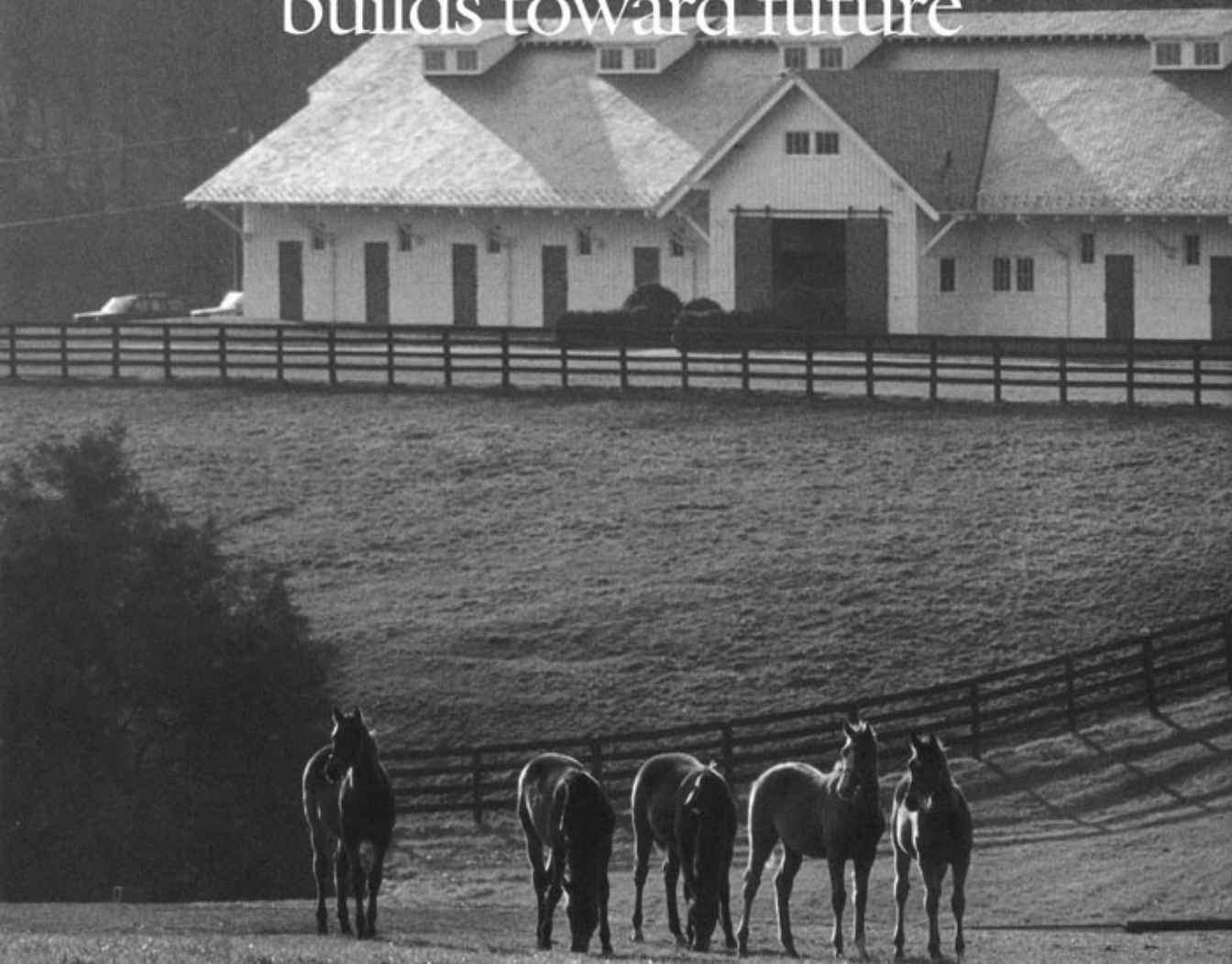
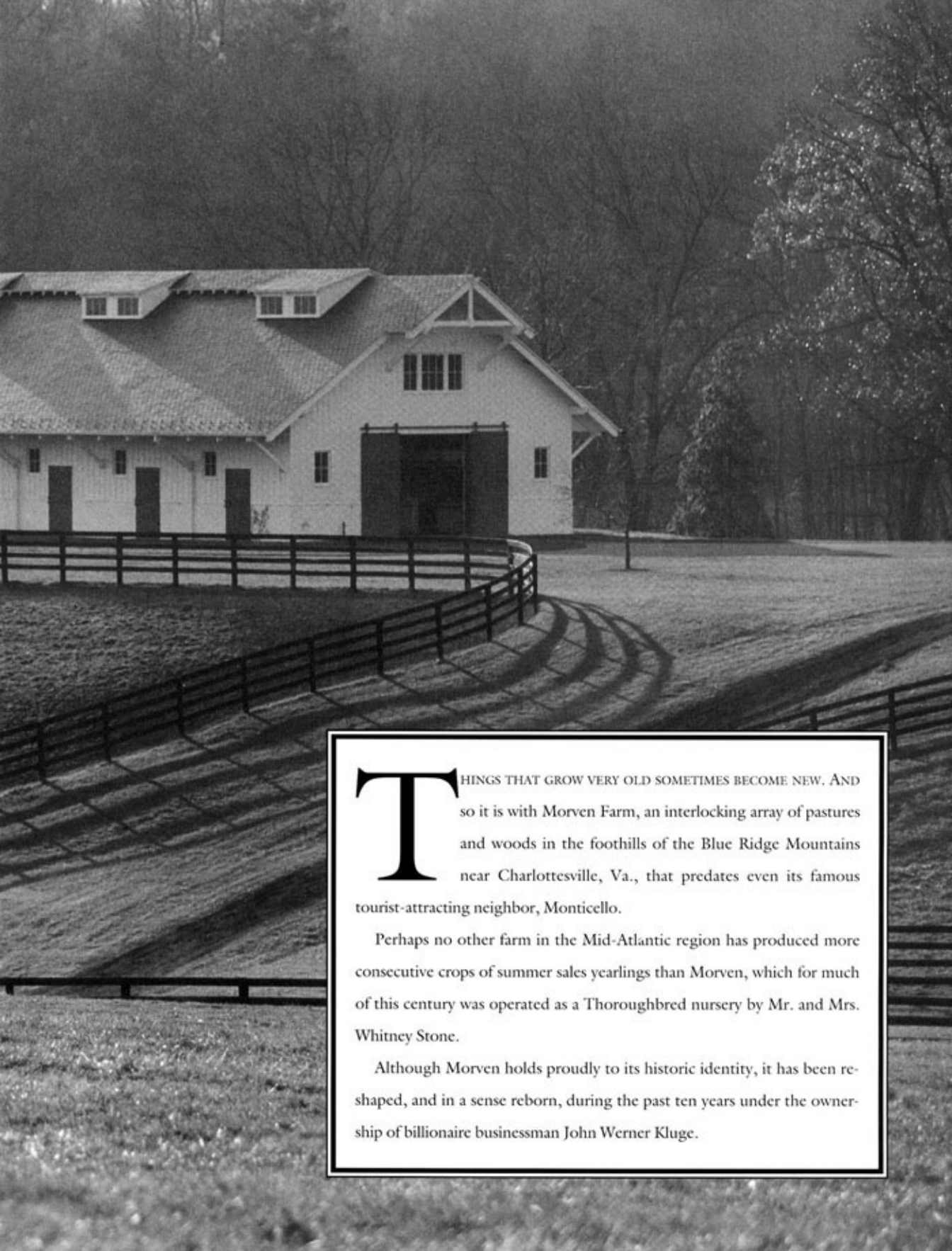


Morven Stud: age-old Virginia farm builds toward future



Producing top quality sales yearlings is goal of
farm owned since 1988 by businessman John Kluge

Story by Lucy Acton
Photographs by Brant Gamma



THINGS THAT GROW VERY OLD SOMETIMES BECOME NEW. AND so it is with Morven Farm, an interlocking array of pastures and woods in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Charlottesville, Va., that predates even its famous tourist-attracting neighbor, Monticello.

Perhaps no other farm in the Mid-Atlantic region has produced more consecutive crops of summer sales yearlings than Morven, which for much of this century was operated as a Thoroughbred nursery by Mr. and Mrs. Whitney Stone.

Although Morven holds proudly to its historic identity, it has been reshaped, and in a sense reborn, during the past ten years under the ownership of billionaire businessman John Werner Kluge.

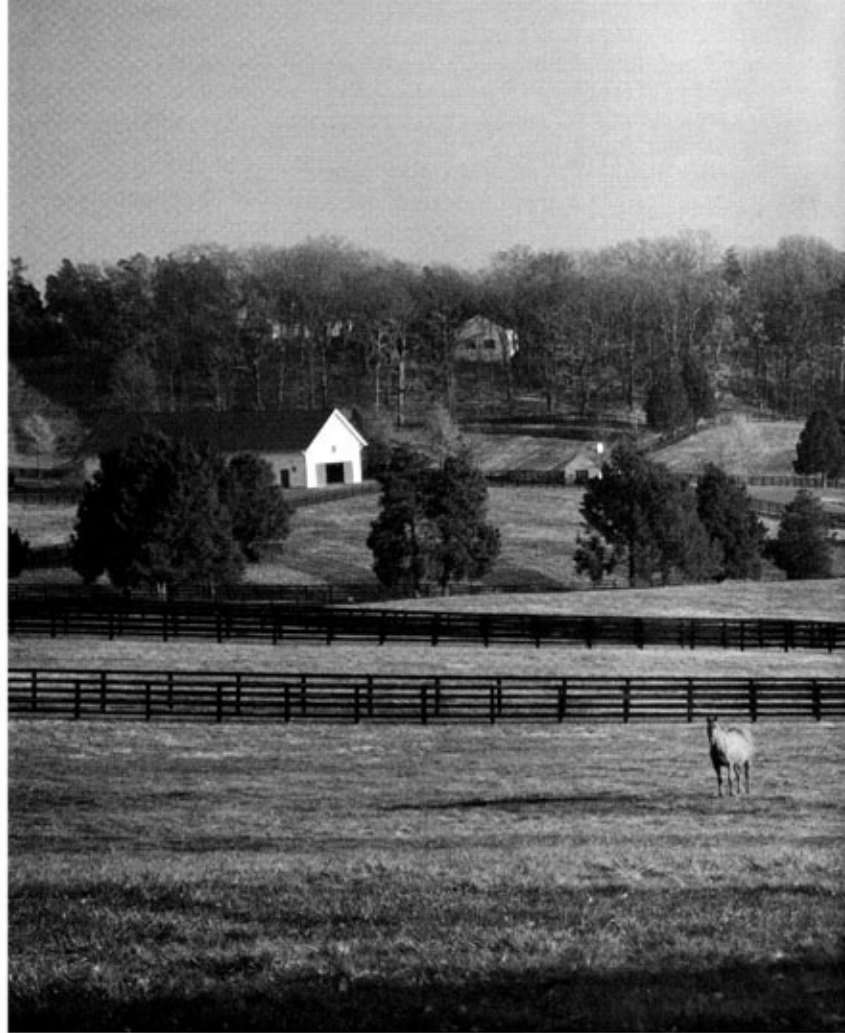
MORVEN FARM IS HUGE—8,500 acres in all—and its horse operation, Morven Stud, occupies only a fraction of that land, about 275 acres. But from where Morven Stud farm manager Dale Holly sits in his office located on a portion of the farm once known as Ellerslie, that is just about all a visitor can survey.

How important is the Thoroughbred division in the overall scheme of Morven? "Most important!" says Holly, then laughs to indicate that the issue is at least debatable. A professional horseman who arrived as manager here in 1989, and was involved in all the construction of the new barns and fences, Holly goes on to explain that Morven Stud is one of two profit-oriented divisions—the other being cattle and crops.

To design and maintain a Thoroughbred operation that capitalizes on quality is the job of Dale Holly and his compatriot Russell Jones. A long-prominent bloodstock agent in Pennsylvania, Jones has served as Kluge's Thoroughbred advisor since 1991, making regular visits to the farm to keep abreast of the horses' development, consulting with Holly on matings and representing Morven in the buying and selling of horses. Jones also keeps in contact with Morven's trainers—Graham Motion at Laurel Park and Frank Brothers at Gulfstream—who between them have five horses for Kluge.

Although not himself a horseman, Kluge, who has owned Thoroughbreds since 1988—the same year he bought Morven—is "very interested in every move we make," says Jones. Kluge, 83, founded a media empire upon a Silver Spring, Md., radio station he bought in 1946, and has since prospered through such diverse businesses as laundromats and peanut packaging (according to *Forbes* magazine).

The owner definitely enjoys his farm, says Holly. "He loves to see the broodmares and foals, and he has a real sense of responsibility toward his role in carrying on Morven."



Broodmare gems

"Our ideal for Morven Stud," explains Jones, "has been to operate a commercial breeding establishment with 20 to 25 broodmares, selling almost the entire yearling crop every year (occasionally we will keep a good filly). All of our breeding plans have been oriented toward the Keeneland July and Saratoga sales, or the select portion of Keeneland September. That is our *ideal*."

"We are now in the process of adjusting to strategically reduce the number of broodmares, probably to under 20, and increase their average value," he adds.

It is a matter of refinement, intended to reshape Morven's broodmare band into "a bag of gems" within the next two or three years, says Jones. "We are constantly in the

process of culling—every year we take a few off the bottom and add a few at the top."

The Keeneland November sale, that Tiffany's of broodmare auctions, was well patronized by Morven in 1997. Morven sold seven mares at that sale, and bought three at a total cost of \$1.45 million.

Considered the most alluring of the trio is Electric Society (Ire), whom Morven purchased privately following the auction, in which the mare failed to meet her reserve with a high bid of \$775,000.

The most expensive broodmare acquired by Morven in recent years, Electric Society (\$443,582, Diana H-G2, New York H-G2, The Very One H-G3, etc.), a 7-year-old daughter of Irish champion Law Society (a son of



Morven's barns, including the one used for yearlings (at far right in photograph), are designed to be supremely functional, but horses are kept outdoors as much as possible.

because they seemed to be too great a risk (conformation-wise), then watched them bring a lot of money based on their racing performance and pedigree."

What are some problems that stop the Morven scouts in their tracks? "We're pretty fussy about forelegs," explains Jones. "Offset knees, mares who are back at the knee. . . ." Adds Holly: "There isn't much excuse when you have a foal with poor conformation, and you look at the dam, and realize he looks exactly like her."

"The main thing we look for (in a broodmare) is overall balance," says Jones. "We've had the best success with well-balanced, athletically conformed mares. Those mares also seem more likely to have foals who resemble them."

Fortunately (for him, as well as Mr. Kluge), Jones hit a home run with the first mare he selected for Morven. That is Buy the Firm, a 1986 daughter of Affirmed. Morven bought Buy the Firm privately in January, 1991, and in April of that year she carried the farm's colors to victory in the Grade 1 Top Flight Handicap at Aqueduct. Retired at the end of that season with career earnings of \$735,409, she has had a foal every year since 1993. Two of her offspring (a '94 colt and '95 filly, each by Storm Cat) brought more than \$400,000 at Saratoga; Morven has sold her first four yearlings for a combined total of \$1,105,000 and will market a Danzig filly out of Buy the Firm in 1998. Buy the Firm is due to foal again to Danzig this season.

Sire power

To be chosen as a mate for one of Morven's broodmares, a stallion must, of course, be among the true Thoroughbred elite. "We use only stallions who have had either tremendous racing success, or sale success,"

Alleged), is carrying her first foal, due in early March, by Storm Cat.

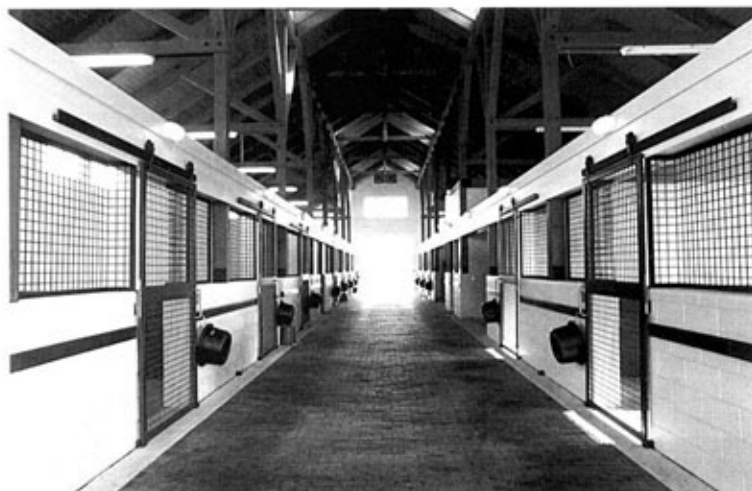
Also purchased by Jones's Walnut Green agency on Morven's behalf were the mares Too Cool to Fool (by Foolish Pleasure) for \$400,000, and August Moondreams (by Green Dancer), \$225,000. Both are young mares, expecting March foals. Too Cool to Fool, a stakes winner of \$183,517, is in foal to Unbridled's Song. August Moondreams, a half-sister to graded stakes winner Paula Revere, was mated to Mr. Prospector's son Smart Strike.

The criteria used by Jones and Holly in selecting mares begins with simple economics. A gem tends to lose a lot of its luster as the price approaches a million dollars. "Our goal is to sell that mare's foals at a profit, and your chances of getting a sub-

stantial return on investment are not as good with a million-dollar mare as with one in the \$200,000 to \$400,000 range," explains Jones. "But we don't have a set limit on what we'll spend."

Like most commercial nurseries, Morven puts a lot of stock in youth. "We don't keep many mares past the age of 13, or 14," says Jones. "The only exceptions are usually multiple stakes producers." Thus Holly and Jones's shopping trips generally focus on mares recently retired from the track. "We probably won't be buying any more unraced mares," Jones states.

As for the qualities that can't be found on a catalogue page: "We may be tougher on conformation than a lot of other people," says Jones. "We've passed on some broodmares



From top: Farm manager Dale Holly shows off recent purchase Electric Society (Ire); Holly and general manager Russell Jones (right) inspect one of Morven's just-turned yearlings, a daughter of Holy Bull and the Mr. Prospector mare Goldminness; yearling barn, the first to be completed, won a national award in 1991.

explains Jones. "We've steered clear of the mid-range, and under. The market eliminates a lot of choices."

Jones and Holly are arguably as well-equipped as anyone in the world when it comes to making these kinds of decisions, but with hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of dollars hanging on the outcome of every mating, Morven's advisors have advisors of their own. They consult with two pedigree experts, both in England—Brain International of Oxford and Alex Scrope of Newmarket. Why the overseas location? It just happened that way, says Jones. "We explored a lot of the pedigree advising services that are out there; we were attracted to the in-depth approach of these two."

Scrope has advised on Morven matings since 1992; Brain since 1994. "I would say they've definitely had a positive impact. We've seen an improvement in the quality of our foals each year," comments Jones.

Mares routinely foal at the home farm, and are shipped—with rare exceptions, to Kentucky—for breeding. "We've used a few stallions outside of Kentucky: for instance Private Terms, when he was in Maryland, and With Approval in Florida, but the horses we breed to in other states seem to end up in Kentucky."

Morven's mares are almost always bred using individual seasons purchased just for them. From which it might be concluded that Morven owns no stallion shares, which would be totally wrong.

"Investing in stallions is a big part of our operation—at least 50 percent," says Jones. Although Morven does not stand any stallions at its farm, it owns between 25 and 75 percent of six stallions, all stakes winners, who stand in Kentucky: Boundary, Canaveral, Capote, Golden Gear, Gone for Real and Unaccounted For.

"We're always in the market for stallion prospects, and we acquire them in a variety of ways, at various stages of their lives," Jones explains. Capote, for instance, was an established sire when Morven bought a

major interest in him. Then there is Unaccounted For, whom Morven purchased as a yearling (for \$230,000 at Saratoga), and campaigned to earn \$998,468 before retiring him to Lane's End Farm, where he stands as the property of a syndicate, on a private contract basis. Unaccounted For (by Private Account) carried the Morven Stud colors to victory in the Grade 1 Whitney Handicap and Jim Dandy Stakes-G2, and placed in four other stakes, including a second in the Jockey Club Gold Cup-G1 and third in the Breeders' Cup Classic-G1.

Morven purchased an interest in \$634,009-earner Golden Gear during his racing career, and bought part of Danzig's graded stakes-winning son Boundary upon his retirement. Also acquired as yearlings were Gone for Real (by Gone West) and Canaveral, who is by Relaunch.

Morven's stallion seasons are rarely used on the farm's own mares, because, says Jones, "We don't want to get in a situation where we're limiting ourselves; we can breed to any horse we want to."

Building toward excellence

Dale Holly, 41, had zero contact with horses while growing up in Xenia, Ohio, but found his calling while working as a foaling nightwatchman during his student days at Eastern Kentucky University. Would he have believed, back then, that he might someday be in charge of an architecturally award-winning foaling barn with padded, temperature-controlled stalls? "Yes," is Holly's answer.

Managing a farm like Morven has always his goal. And Holly, who lives in a handsomely preserved farm house on the Morven property with his wife Denise, a nurse, and their two children ages 13 and 11, has worked hard to achieve it. Before coming to Morven, he was employed by three of Kentucky's largest and most successful Thoroughbred breeding establishments—as assistant broodmare manager at Lane's End Farm, preceded by a stint at Airdrie Stud, preceded by service at Spend-

thrift (a traditional starting place for many of the industry's hands-on managers). Each of those farms provided Holly with "a lot of valuable experience in a short amount of time," as he describes it.

When he arrived at Morven, the first order of business was to guide it through a construction phase. "We basically redid the farm," he says. "We built three barns, refurbished one and tore down three."

Morven's barns have earned almost as many press clippings as its horses. The renovated barn, originally built from trees grown on the farm, was named the National Framing Builders Association's 1991 "horse facilities building of the year." Then in 1994, the new broodmare, yearling and foaling barns, designed by the architectural firm **Smith Blackburn Stauffer** in Washington, D.C., were selected to receive a prestigious excellence award from the Washing-

ton chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

These are not glitzy palaces designed for human comfort. Blending easily into the landscape, with sloping slate roofs, and sides painted white with green trim, they are built to be supremely functional horse barns, with towering ceilings, wide center aisles paved with textured brick, and heavy-metal mesh screens on stalls that open both to the inside and outside.

In the foaling stalls, a plexiglass panel can be inserted into the top part of the interior wall, instantly creating a kind of neonatal ICU unit. In addition to heat lamps, the stalls are equipped with forced-air heat. "Within two minutes, in the dead of winter, we can get the temperature up to 85 degrees," says Holly.

A covered round pen, 50 feet in diameter, with wood chips under foot and a two-story high ceiling, is attached to one end of the foaling

Morven chronology

According to a chronology on display in the office of Morven Stud, John Kluge is the eighth owner of the property, which traces back to a 1730 land grant to John Carter, Secretary of the Colony. The original estate was 9,350 acres.

In 1796, the property—then known as Indian Camp—was transferred to Colonel William Short, Thomas Jefferson's secretary and protégé who has been called "America's first career diplomat." Short and Jefferson intended to farm the property together, but instead, in 1813, it was used to settle a large debt incurred by Jefferson with a local storekeeper, David Higginbotham.

It was Higginbotham who named the farm Morven. The farm passed through three additional owners—Smith (1853-1906), Marshall (1906-1923) and Patterson (1923-1926)—before being purchased in 1926 by Charles A. Stone, a founder of a prominent engineering firm in New York.

Morven became a famed Thoroughbred nursery under the propri-

etorship of Whitney Stone, who inherited the farm from his father in 1941. The Stones' *creme de la creme* consignments at the Saratoga Yearling sales spanned 50 years, and in 1978 set a record for the most expensive yearling sold at auction—a colt by Nijinsky II out of Shuvee, who brought \$800,000.

Much of the aura surrounding Morven could be credited to homebred Shuvee, who reigned as the nation's champion handicap mare in 1969 and 1970, and was the all-time leading distaff money-earner, with a career total of \$890,445, when retired to the Morven broodmare band. Shuvee went on to produce three stakes winners—Tom Swift, Benefice and Shukey. Other stakes winners bred by Whitney Stone included Getthere Jack, Shimmy Dancer, Godetia, Debbyman, Ruler's Mistress, Traffic Cop and prominent sire Nantallah.

Following Whitney Stone's death in 1979, Morven retained its prominence under the proprietorship of his wife Anne, who died in 1987.

barn, and serves as a protected exercise area for new foals and their dams.

Black four-board fences separate Morven Stud from its neighbors, and create hilly, wide-open pastures within its own borders. Most of it—at least 12 miles—has been built since the late 1980s; it is oak, with six-inch posts shaved at the base, explains Holly. An important detail—the bottom boards are a foot off the ground, to allow room for a mower that cuts underneath the bottom boards and eliminates weedeating.

Every inch of the buildings and grounds is, of course, immaculate. “Mr. Kluge’s saying is ‘the backyard has to look as good as the front yard,’” explains Holly. “But I like to tell our people: ‘A clean farm is a happy farm.’”

Raising runners

It’s perhaps fortunate for Morven’s horses that the barns are appealing-looking on the outside, because that’s the view they most often get to see. The usual routine calls for horses

to be outside 22 hours a day, explains Holly, with obvious exceptions for illness, injury, foaling or sales-prepping.

Of the farm’s feeding program, Holly says: “Since our horses are outside the vast majority of the time, our pastures are the main source of nutrition for our animals.

“In the fields we have sown bluegrass, perennial rye grass, orchard grass and red and white clovers. Pasture clippings and soil samples are taken twice a year by The Farm Clinic, a consulting firm in Lexington, Ky., which then makes fertilizing and seeding recommendations.

“We feed a mixed hay of alfalfa and timothy or orchard grass purchased locally or wherever we can find it. Southern States produces our custom-made sweet feed that was designed by Dr. Steve Jackson of Bluegrass Equine Nutrition with the help of Dr. David Kronfeld from the Middleburg Agricultural Research and Education Center.”

Best is yet to come

So far, Morven’s success has been measured in a steady flow of six-figure sales yearlings.

The best runner bred by Morven Stud to date has been Smolensk (a 1992 filly by Danzig—Blush With Pride, by Blushing Groom—Fr), a multiple group stakes winner in France.

Another headliner was the Danzig colt out of Lady in Silver sold by Morven at the 1995 Barretts 2-year-olds in training sale in California for \$900,000. (That colt was one of several in the sale who topped the then-record for an unraced 2-year-old.) Lady in Silver also raced for Morven, placing second in the Grade 1 Arlington Million as a 3-year-old in 1989, and winning the Cardinal Handicap the following season.

But considering Morven’s past, it’s difficult to imagine that all of this is not a prologue to the future—to the BIG HORSE, just around the bend in the peaceful Virginia countryside. ♦

The Hancock connection

To Thoroughbred historians, much of the land within Morven Farm’s present-day borders is hallowed ground—and not just because of the horses who have roamed there.

The Morven of the 1990s encompasses a farm that for many years existed separately, and was known as Ellerslie. This was the ancestral home of the Hancock family, which journeyed “over the mountain” to establish that vast Thoroughbred breeding conglomerate known as Claiborne Farm.

The saga of the Hancocks, whose family graveyard remains as tangible evidence of their roots in this land, begins on a suitably romantic note. During the Civil War a wounded officer, Captain Richard J. Hancock, convalesced in a nearby wood. The Harris family, which lived at Ellerslie, sent provisions to the wounded soldier, and from them he eventually took a bride, Thomasina Overton Harris, through whose inheritance Hancock became master of Ellerslie.

Capt. Hancock became one of the leading Thoroughbred owner/breeders of that era, his best horses including Eole (a prominent winner in this country and in England, where, at age 8, he finished second in the 1885 Ascot Gold Cup), Knight of Ellerslie, winner of the 1884 Preakness, and champion Morello.

Capt. Hancock’s fourth son Arthur (Arthur B. Hancock Sr.) took over the full operation of Ellerslie in 1909, three years before the father’s death. *The Blood-Horse* editor Kent Hollings-

worth, in 1972, chronicled that chapter in the Hancock family history as follows: “. . . the Thoroughbred industry was (then) at its lowest ebb in the United States. Racing was being terminated in New York, barely surviving in Kentucky and Maryland, and top Thoroughbred mares were bringing prices only slightly above those for work horses. Ellerslie’s broodmare band was reduced to a dozen. About that time, Hancock leased and then bought Celt from James R. Keene, racing was revived, and the progeny of Celt restored Ellerslie’s reputation.

“In 1908, Hancock married Nancy Tucker Clay of Paris, Ky., who two years later inherited about 1,300 acres of the best land in Bourbon County (Ky.). For five years there was considerable traveling across mountains between the two farms until it was decided that Ellerslie was well organized with experienced help and could take better care of itself than the new farm, so the family moved to Kentucky.”

Hancock Sr. continued to operate both farms, and it was their combined operations that made him the nation’s leading breeder throughout most of the 1930s and 1940s.

A.B. (Bull) Hancock Jr. was placed in charge of Ellerslie in 1937, as his father groomed him for command of the family empire, and Bull Hancock briefly stood *Princequillo at the Virginia farm, before moving him to Kentucky.

In 1946, the Hancock family sold Ellerslie to Robert Schlesinger, a breeder of prized cattle.

Morven's 1998 broodmare band

AROS (1991, by Fappiano—Round the Rosie, by Cornish Prince). Winner. Half-sister to GSW Rose Bouquet and Big Sink Hope (SW in France). In foal for '98 to A.P. Indy; booked to Holy Bull.

AUGUST MOONDREAMS (1992, by Green Dancer—Dodie-GB, by Blakency). Winner of \$78,078. Half-sister to GSW Paula Revere (\$294,100). In foal for '98 to Smart Strike; booked to Kris S.

BUY THE FIRM (1986, by Affirmed—By the Hand, by Intentionally). G1SW of \$735,409. Half-sister to G1SW Image of Greatness (\$230,699). 1997 filly by Danzig; in foal for '98 to Danzig; booked to Danzig.

DOUBLE WEDGE (1985, by Northern Baby—Kit's Double, by Spring Double). Multiple G1SW of \$435,522. Half-sister to SW Exclusive Darling. In foal for '98 to Twinning; booked to Capote.

ELECTRIC SOCIETY (Ire) (1991, by Law Society—Sofala, by Home Guard). Multiple GSW of \$443,582. Half-sister to Bourbon Boy, multiple GSW in Australia. In foal for '98 to Storm Cat; booked to Danzig.

EXPLORE (1991, by Mr. Prospector—Veroushka, by Nijinsky II). Unraced. Full sister to GSW Gild and half-sister to multiple GSW Lucence (\$329,125). Dam is a half-sister to champion Wajima and Naskra. 1997 colt by With Approval; in foal for '98 to Chief's Crown; booked to Gilded Time.

IN SPATE (1985, by In Reality—Casapedia, by Chieftain). Out of a champion. Winning half-sister to GSWs Glacial Stream (\$273,203) and Cascading Gold (\$225,050). Dam of SP Gold Surf. 1997 filly by Silver Hawk; barren for '98; booked to Afternoon Declites.

IN VIEW (1989, by In Reality—Sweeping View, by Reviewer). Winner of \$32,020. Dam is G1SP half-sister to Ballade, dam of champions Glorious Song and Devil's Bag, and additional SWs Saint Ballado and Thaidah. Family of champion Singspiel (Ire) and sires Rahy and

Rakeen. 1997 filly by Unaccounted For; in foal for '98 to Seattle Slew.

LADY IN SILVER (1986, by Silver Hawk—Lorn Lady-GB, by *Lorenzaccio). Champion 3-year-old filly in France; second in '89 Arlington Million-G1; earned \$630,606. Dam of Danzig colt who sold for a record-breaking \$900,000 at the 1995 Barretts 2-year-olds in training sale. 1997 filly by Kingmambo; barren for '98; booked to Spinning World.

LA PEPITE (1985, by Mr. Prospector—Fanfreluche, by Northern Dancer). Out of horse of the year and champion 3-year-old filly in Canada. Half-sister to L'Enjoleur (horse of the year in Canada twice), La Voyageuse (champion 3-year-old filly, champion handicap mare in Canada), Medaille d'Or (champion 2-year-old colt in Canada), GSW D'Accord and SW Grand Luxe. Dam of SP Patriot Strike (\$213,380). 1997 colt by Riverman; barren for '98; booked to Dixieland Band.

MISS WAIKIKI (1987, by Miswaki—Close Comfort, by Far North). SP winner of \$43,700. Half-sister to GSW Husyan. Out of half-sister to French champions Cricket Ball and Ancient Regime, GSW Mug Punter and Olden. In foal for '98 to Sultry Song; booked to Summer Squall.

MYRRH (1987, by Damascus—Christmas Past, by *Grey Dawn II). Winner in only start. Out of a champion from the family of champion Our Mims and Alydar. 1997 filly by Nureyev; in foal for '98 to Kris S.; booked to Seattle Slew.

REDRESS (1991, by Storm Cat—Sticky Habit-GB, by Habitat). Winner of \$78,996. Half-sister to GSWs Aim for the Top and Splendent. In foal for '98 to Rubiano; booked to Quiet American.

SEA BREEZER (1992, by Gulch—Lakeville Miss, by Rainy Lake). G1SP earner of \$142,978. Out of a champion. Half-sister to G1SW Mogambo (\$958,176). 1997 filly by Danzig; in foal for '98 to Danzig; booked to Danzig.

SHEILA'S REVENGE (1990, by Lord Avic—Clear Copy, by Copy

Chief). Multiple GSP earner of \$207,060. Out of multiple GSW. Half-sister to SW Syrian Sands and GSP Brasher Doubloon. 1997 colt by Danzig; barren for '98; booked to Seeking the Gold.

SPOTLIGHT DANCE (1989, by Miswaki—Surgery, by Dr. Fager). Half-sister to multiple G1SW Sewickley (\$1,017,517), G1SW Shared Interest (\$667,610) and SW Left Court. Family of Mr. Prospector. 1997 colt by Chief's Crown; barren for '98; booked to Theatrical (Ire).

SPOTTY LIGHT RAIN (1991, by Cryptoclearance—Rain a Little by Rainy Lake). Winner of \$36,012. Half-sister to GSW Dual Elements (\$644,271) and MSWs Grand Splash and Spankey's Seconds. 1997 colt by Tabasco Cat; in foal for '98 to Devil's Bag; booked to Wild Again.

TOO COOL TO FOOL (1991, by Foolish Pleasure—Our Tina Marie, by Nijinsky II). SW of \$183,517. Half-sister to MSW Merit Wings. Family of champion Sunshine Forever and millionaires Brian's Time and Memories of Silver. In foal for '98 to Unbridled's Song; booked to Nureyev.

VANITIES (1986, by Nureyev—Play It Safe-Ire, by Red Alert). SW of \$174,732. Out of a champion half-sister to G1SW Providential (Ire) and SW Prudent Manner (Ire). Half-sister to multiple GSP Safety Catch (\$309,598). In foal for '98 to Brocco; booked to Carson City.

WINDMILL POINT (1990, by Storm Bird—Cinegita, by Secretariat). Out of GSW. Full sister to GSW and stakes producer Storm Star and to the dam of champion Flanders; half-sister to SW Syourinomegami and GSP Choctaw Ridge. 1997 colt by Miswaki; in foal for '98 to Quiet American.

WRAP AROUND (Aus) (1987, by Bletchingly—Beach Gown-Aus by Cerreto). Multiple GSW in Australia and SW in U.S. Half-sister to GSW Rose of Danchill out of a GSW in Australia. 1997 colt by Capote; in foal for '98 to Capote; booked to El Gran Senor.